

SELECTIONS FROM THE
PRISON NOTEBOOKS
OF
ANTONIO GRAMSCI

edited and translated by
QUINTIN HOARE
and
GEOFFREY NOWELL SMITH

1971
INTERNATIONAL PUBLISHERS
New York

the ideology these forces have generated and which has become part of what Gramsci calls "common sense". This last term is used by Gramsci to mean the uncritical and largely unconscious way of perceiving and understanding the world that has become "common" in any given epoch. (Correspondingly he uses the phrase "good sense" to mean the practical, but not necessarily rational or scientific attitude that in English is usually called common sense.) The critique of "common sense" and that of "the philosophy of the philosophers" are therefore complementary aspects of a single ideological struggle. This struggle must be waged, as Gramsci himself wages it, with the utmost intensity, but its ultimate resolution lies on another terrain, that of "revolutionising praxis", which alone can determine the forms of thought appropriate to the new age.

THE STUDY OF PHILOSOPHY

SOME PRELIMINARY POINTS OF REFERENCE

It is essential to destroy the widespread prejudice that philosophy is a strange and difficult thing just because it is the specific intellectual activity of a particular category of specialists or of professional and systematic philosophers. It must first be shown that all men are "philosophers", by defining the limits and characteristics of the "spontaneous philosophy" which is proper to everybody. This philosophy is contained in: 1. language itself, which is a totality of determined notions and concepts and not just of words grammatically devoid of content; 2. "common sense" and "good sense";¹ 3. popular religion and, therefore, also in the entire system of beliefs, superstitions, opinions, ways of seeing things and of acting, which are collectively bundled together under the name of "folklore".

Having first shown that everyone is a philosopher, though in his own way and unconsciously, since even in the slightest manifestation of any intellectual activity whatever, in "language", there is contained a specific conception of the world, one then moves on to the second level, which is that of awareness and criticism. That is to say, one proceeds to the question—is it better to "think", without having a critical awareness, in a disjointed and episodic way? In other words, is it better to take part in a conception of the world mechanically imposed by the external environment, i.e. by one of the many social groups in which everyone is automatically involved from the moment of his entry into the conscious world (and this can be one's village or province; it can have its origins in the parish and the "intellectual activity" of the local priest or aging patriarch whose wisdom is law, or in the little old woman who has inherited the lore of the witches or the minor intellectual soured by his own stupidity and inability to act)? Or, on the other hand, is it better to work out consciously and critically one's own conception of the world and thus, in connection with the labours of one's own brain, choose one's sphere of activity, take an active part in the creation of the history of the world, be one's own guide, refusing to accept

¹ The meaning that Gramsci gives to these two terms is explained in the paragraphs which follow. Broadly speaking, "common sense" means the incoherent set of generally held assumptions and beliefs common to any given society, while "good sense" means practical empirical common sense in the English sense of the term. See also introduction to this section.

passively and supinely from outside the moulding of one's personality?

Note I. In acquiring one's conception of the world one always belongs to a particular grouping which is that of all the social elements which share the same mode of thinking and acting. We are all conformists of some conformism or other, always man-in-the-mass or collective man. The question is this: of what historical type is the conformism, the mass humanity to which one belongs? When one's conception of the world is not critical and coherent but disjointed and episodic, one belongs simultaneously to a multiplicity of mass human groups. The personality is strangely composite: it contains Stone Age elements and principles of a more advanced science, prejudices from all past phases of history at the local level and intuitions of a future philosophy which will be that of a human race united the world over. To criticise one's own conception of the world means therefore to make it a coherent unity and to raise it to the level reached by the most advanced thought in the world. It therefore also means criticism of all previous philosophy, in so far as this has left stratified deposits in popular philosophy. The starting-point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is "knowing thyself"¹ as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory.

Note II. Philosophy cannot be separated from the history of philosophy, nor can culture from the history of culture. In the most immediate and relevant sense, one cannot be a philosopher, by which I mean have a critical and coherent conception of the world, without having a consciousness of its historicity, of the phase of development which it represents and of the fact that it contradicts other conceptions or elements of other conceptions. One's conception of the world is a response to certain specific problems posed by reality, which are quite specific and "original" in their immediate relevance. How is it possible to consider the present, and quite specific present, with a mode of thought elaborated for a past which is often remote and superseded? When someone does this, it means that he is a walking anachronism, a fossil, and not living in the modern world, or at the least that he is strangely composite. And it is in fact the case that social groups which in some ways express the most developed

¹ "Know thyself" was the inscription written above the gate of the Oracle at Delphi, and became a principle of Socratic philosophy.

modernity, lag behind in other respects, given their social position, and are therefore incapable of complete historical autonomy.

Note III. If it is true that every language contains the elements of a conception of the world and of a culture, it could also be true that from anyone's language one can assess the greater or lesser complexity of his conception of the world. Someone who only speaks dialect, or understands the standard language incompletely, necessarily has an intuition of the world which is more or less limited and provincial, which is fossilised and anachronistic in relation to the major currents of thought which dominate world history. His interests will be limited, more or less corporate or economic,² not universal. While it is not always possible to learn a number of foreign languages in order to put oneself in contact with other cultural lives, it is at the least necessary to learn the national language properly. A great culture can be translated into the language of another great culture, that is to say a great national language with historic richness and complexity, and it can translate any other great culture and can be a world-wide means of expression. But a dialect cannot do this.

Note IV. Creating a new culture does not only mean one's own individual "original" discoveries. It also, and most particularly, means the diffusion in a critical form of truths already discovered, their "socialisation" as it were, and even making them the basis of vital action,³ an element of co-ordination and intellectual and moral order. For a mass of people to be led to think coherently and in the same coherent fashion about the real present world, is a "philosophical" event far more important and "original" than the discovery by some philosophical "genius" of a truth which remains the property of small groups of intellectuals.

Connection between "common sense", religion and philosophy

Philosophy is intellectual order, which neither religion nor common sense can be. It is to be observed that religion and common sense do not coincide either, but that religion is an element of fragmented common sense. Moreover common sense is a collective noun, like religion: there is not just one common sense, for that too is a product

² See note on Gramsci's terminology, pp. xiii-xiv.

³ "vital action." The concept here would appear to derive from Bergson, some of whose ideas were filtered to Gramsci through Sorel and in a sense provided him with a psychological antidote to the fatalism of Austro-Marxism. There is no question, however, of Bergson having had a systematic influence on Gramsci's "philosophy of praxis" as such.

of history and a part of the historical process.⁶ Philosophy is criticism and the superseding of religion and "common sense". In this sense it coincides with "good" as opposed to "common" sense.

Relation between science, religion and common sense

Religion and common sense cannot constitute an intellectual order, because they cannot be reduced to unity and coherence even within an individual consciousness, let alone collective consciousness. Or rather they cannot be so reduced "freely"—for this may be done by "authoritarian" means, and indeed within limits this has been done in the past.

Note the problem of religion taken not in the confessional sense but in the secular sense of a unity of faith between a conception of the world and a corresponding norm of conduct. But why call this unity of faith "religion" and not "ideology", or even frankly "politics"?⁷

Philosophy in general does not in fact exist. Various philosophies or conceptions of the world exist, and one always makes a choice between them. How is this choice made? Is it merely an intellectual event, or is it something more complex? And is it not frequently the case that there is a contradiction between one's intellectual choice and one's mode of conduct? Which therefore would be the real conception of the world: that logically affirmed as an intellectual choice? or that which emerges from the real activity of each man, which is implicit in his mode of action? And since all action is political, can one not say that the real philosophy of each man is contained in its entirety in his political action?

This contrast between thought and action, i.e. the co-existence of two conceptions of the world, one affirmed in words and the other displayed in effective action, is not simply a product of self-

⁶ "part of the historical process." In the original "*un divenire storico*"—historical becoming. For this aspect of common sense see Int., p. 144: "Every social stratum has its own 'common sense' and its own 'good sense', which are basically the most widespread conception of life and of man. Every philosophical current leaves behind a sedimentation of 'common sense': this is the document of its historical effectiveness. Common sense is not something rigid and immobile, but is continually transforming itself, enriching itself with scientific ideas and with philosophical opinions which have entered ordinary life. 'Common sense' is the folklore of philosophy, and is always half-way between folklore properly speaking and the philosophy, science, and economics of the specialists. Common sense creates the folklore of the future, that is as a relatively rigid phase of popular knowledge at a given place and time."

⁷ For Gramsci's uses of "ideology" in its various senses see pp. 375-77. By "politics" Gramsci means conscious action (praxis) in pursuit of a common social goal.

deception [*malafede*]. Self-deception can be an adequate explanation for a few individuals taken separately, or even for groups of a certain size, but it is not adequate when the contrast occurs in the life of great masses. In these cases the contrast between thought and action cannot but be the expression of profounder contrasts of a social historical order. It signifies that the social group in question may indeed have its own conception of the world, even if only embryonic; a conception which manifests itself in action, but occasionally and in flashes—when, that is, the group is acting as an organic totality. But this same group has, for reasons of submission and intellectual subordination, adopted a conception which is not its own but is borrowed from another group; and it affirms this conception verbally and believes itself to be following it, because this is the conception which it follows in "normal times"⁷—that is when its conduct is not independent and autonomous, but submissive and subordinate. Hence the reason why philosophy cannot be divorced from politics. And one can show furthermore that the choice and the criticism of a conception of the world is also a political matter.

What must next be explained is how it happens that in all periods there co-exist many systems and currents of philosophical thought, how these currents are born, how they are diffused, and why in the process of diffusion they fracture along certain lines and in certain directions. The fact of this process goes to show how necessary it is to order in a systematic, coherent and critical fashion one's own intuitions of life and the world, and to determine exactly what is to be understood by the word "systematic", so that it is not taken in the pedantic and academic sense. But this elaboration must be, and can only be, performed in the context of the history of philosophy, for it is this history which shows how thought has been elaborated over the centuries and what a collective effort has gone into the creation of our present method of thought which has subsumed and absorbed all this past history, including all its follies and mistakes. Nor should these mistakes themselves be neglected, for, although made in the past and since corrected, one cannot be sure that they will not be reproduced in the present and once again require correcting.

What is the popular image of philosophy? It can be reconstructed by looking at expressions in common usage. One of the most usual

⁷ "normal times": as opposed to the exceptional (and hence potentially revolutionary) moments in history in which a class or group discovers its objective and subjective unity in action.

is "being philosophical about it", which, if you consider it, is not to be entirely rejected as a phrase. It is true that it contains an implicit invitation to resignation and patience, but it seems to me that the most important point is rather the invitation to people to reflect and to realise fully that whatever happens is basically rational and must be confronted as such, and that one should apply one's power of rational concentration and not let oneself be carried away by instinctive and violent impulses. These popular turns of phrase could be compared with similar expressions used by writers of a popular stamp—examples being drawn from a large dictionary—which contain the terms "philosophy" or "philosophically". One can see from these examples that the terms have a quite precise meaning: that of overcoming bestial and elemental passions through a conception of necessity which gives a conscious direction to one's activity. This is the healthy nucleus that exists in "common sense", the part of it which can be called "good sense" and which deserves to be made more unitary and coherent. So it appears that here again it is not possible to separate what is known as "scientific" philosophy from the common and popular philosophy which is only a fragmentary collection of ideas and opinions.

But at this point we reach the fundamental problem facing any conception of the world, any philosophy which has become a cultural movement, a "religion", a "faith", any that has produced a form of practical activity or will in which the philosophy is contained as an implicit theoretical "premiss". One might say "ideology" here, but on condition that the word is used in its highest sense of a conception of the world that is implicitly manifest in art, in law, in economic activity and in all manifestations of individual and collective life. This problem is that of preserving the ideological unity of the entire social bloc which that ideology serves to cement and to unify. The strength of religions, and of the Catholic church in particular, has lain, and still lies, in the fact that they feel very strongly the need for the doctrinal unity of the whole mass of the faithful and strive to ensure that the higher intellectual stratum does not get separated from the lower. The Roman church has always been the most vigorous in the struggle to prevent the "official" formation of two religions, one for the "intellectuals" and the other for the "simple souls". This struggle has not been without serious disadvantages for the Church itself, but these disadvantages are connected with the historical process which is transforming the whole of civil society and which contains overall a corrosive critique of all religion, and they only serve to emphasise the organisational

capacity of the clergy in the cultural sphere and the abstractly rational and just relationship which the Church has been able to establish in its own sphere between the intellectuals and the simple. The Jesuits have undoubtedly been the major architects of this equilibrium, and in order to preserve it they have given the Church a progressive forward movement which has tended to allow the demands of science and philosophy to be to a certain extent satisfied. But the rhythm of the movement has been so slow and methodical that the changes have passed unobserved by the mass of the simple, although they appear "revolutionary" and demagogic to the "integralists".⁸

One of the greatest weaknesses of immanentist⁹ philosophies in general consists precisely in the fact that they have not been able to create an ideological unity between the bottom and the top, between the "simple" and the intellectuals. In the history of Western civilisation the fact is exemplified on a European scale, with the rapid collapse of the Renaissance and to a certain extent also the Reformation faced with the Roman church. Their weakness is demonstrated in the educational field, in that the immanentist philosophies have not even attempted to construct a conception which could take the place of religion in the education of children. Hence the pseudo-historicist sophism whereby non-religious, non-confessional, and in reality atheist, educationalists justify allowing the teaching of religion on the grounds that religion is the philosophy of the infancy of mankind renewed in every non-metaphorical infancy. Idealism has also shown itself opposed to cultural movements which "go out to the people", as happened with the so-called "Popular Universities"¹⁰ and similar institutions. Nor was the objection solely to the worst aspects of the institutions, because in that case they could simply have tried to improve them. And yet these movements were worthy of attention, and deserved study. They enjoyed a certain success, in the sense that they demonstrated on

⁸ "Integralists." See note 13 on p. 332.

⁹ By "immanentist philosophies" Gramsci normally means Italian idealism of the beginning of the century (Croce, Gentile, etc.), one of whose features was its rejection of Catholic transcendentalism; but he uses the term here also to characterise much of the philosophical thought of, for example, the Renaissance, which was in a similar way hermetic and incapable of extending its influence beyond elite circles. It should be noted however that Gramsci also describes the philosophy of praxis as in a different sense "immanentist", in that it offers the most consistent rejection of any form of transcendence.

¹⁰ "Popular Universities"—*Università Popolari*. Independent institutes of adult education, more or less equivalent in scope, though not in extension, to the English W.E.A.

the part of the "simple" a genuine enthusiasm and a strong determination to attain a higher cultural level and a higher conception of the world. What was lacking, however, was any organic quality either of philosophical thought or of organisational stability and central cultural direction. One got the impression that it was all rather like the first contacts of English merchants and the negroes of Africa: trashy baubles were handed out in exchange for nuggets of gold. In any case one could only have had cultural stability and an organic quality of thought if there had existed the same unity between the intellectuals and the simple as there should be between theory and practice. That is, if the intellectuals had been organically the intellectuals of those masses, and if they had worked out and made coherent the principles and the problems raised by the masses in their practical activity, thus constituting a cultural and social bloc. The question posed here was the one we have already referred to, namely this: is a philosophical movement properly so called when it is devoted to creating a specialised culture among restricted intellectual groups, or rather when, and only when, in the process of elaborating a form of thought superior to "common sense" and coherent on a scientific plane, it never forgets to remain in contact with the "simple" and indeed finds in this contact the source of the problems it sets out to study and to resolve? Only by this contact does a philosophy become "historical", purify itself of intellectualistic elements of an individual character and become "life".*

A philosophy of praxis¹¹ cannot but present itself at the outset in a polemical and critical guise, as superseding the existing mode of thinking and existing concrete thought (the existing cultural world). First of all, therefore, it must be a criticism of "common sense", basing itself initially, however, on common sense in order to demonstrate that "everyone" is a philosopher and that it is not a question of introducing from scratch a scientific form of thought

* Perhaps it is useful to make a "practical" distinction between philosophy and common sense in order to indicate more clearly the passage from one moment to the other. In philosophy the features of individual elaboration of thought are the most salient: in common sense on the other hand it is the diffuse, unco-ordinated features of a generic form of thought common to a particular period and a particular popular environment. But every philosophy has a tendency to become the common sense of a fairly limited environment (that of all the intellectuals). It is a matter therefore of starting with a philosophy which already enjoys, or could enjoy, a certain diffusion, because it is connected to and implicit in practical life, and elaborating it so that it becomes a renewed common sense possessing the coherence and the sinew of individual philosophies. But this can only happen if the demands of cultural contact with the "simple" are continually felt.

¹¹ "philosophy of praxis." See Introduction, p. xxi.

into everyone's individual life, but of renovating and making "critical" an already existing activity. It must then be a criticism of the philosophy of the intellectuals out of which the history of philosophy developed and which, in so far as it is a phenomenon of individuals (in fact it develops essentially in the activity of single particularly gifted individuals) can be considered as marking the "high points" of the progress made by common sense, or at least the common sense of the more educated strata of society but through them also of the people. Thus an introduction to the study of philosophy must expound in synthetic form the problems that have grown up in the process of the development of culture as a whole and which are only partially reflected in the history of philosophy. (Nevertheless it is the history of philosophy which, in the absence of a history of common sense, impossible to reconstruct for lack of documentary material, must remain the main source of reference.) The purpose of the synthesis must be to criticise the problems, to demonstrate their real value, if any, and the significance they have had as superseded links of an intellectual chain, and to determine what the new contemporary problems are and how the old problems should now be analysed.

The relation between common sense and the upper level of philosophy is assured by "politics", just as it is politics that assures the relationship between the Catholicism of the intellectuals and that of the simple. There are, however, fundamental differences between the two cases. That the Church has to face up to a problem of the "simple" means precisely that there has been a split in the community of the faithful. This split cannot be healed by raising the simple to the level of the intellectuals (the Church does not even envisage such a task, which is both ideologically and economically beyond its present capacities), but only by imposing an iron discipline on the intellectuals so that they do not exceed certain limits of differentiation and so render the split catastrophic and irreparable. In the past such divisions in the community of the faithful were healed by strong mass movements which led to, or were absorbed in, the creation of new religious orders centred on strong personalities (St. Dominic, St. Francis).*

* The heretical movements of the Middle Ages were a simultaneous reaction against the politicking of the Church and against the scholastic philosophy which expressed this. They were based on social conflicts determined by the birth of the Communes, and represented a split between masses and intellectuals within the Church. This split was "stitched over" by the birth of popular religious movements subsequently reabsorbed by the Church through the formation of the mendicant orders and a new religious unity.

But the Counter-Reformation has rendered sterile this upsurge of popular forces. The Society of Jesus is the last of the great religious orders. Its origins were reactionary and authoritarian, and its character repressive and "diplomatic".¹² Its birth marked the hardening of the Catholic organism. New orders which have grown up since then have very little religious significance but a great "disciplinary" significance for the mass of the faithful. They are, or have become, ramifications and tentacles of the Society of Jesus, instruments of "resistance" to preserve political positions that have been gained, not forces of renovation and development. Catholicism has become "Jesuitism". Modernism¹³ has not created "religious orders", but a political party—Christian Democracy.*

The position of the philosophy of praxis is the antithesis of the Catholic. [The philosophy of praxis does not tend to leave the "simple" in their primitive philosophy of common sense, but rather to lead them to a higher conception of life.] If it affirms the need for contact between intellectuals and simple it is not in order to restrict scientific activity and preserve unity at the low level of the masses, but precisely in order to construct an intellectual-

¹² "diplomatic." In a disparaging sense, common in Italian as applied to the superficial machinations of Italian bourgeois politics from Cavour to Giolitti.

¹³ "Modernism." A product of the challenge of Socialism among the masses, Modernism aimed to revitalise the Church as a social force at the end of the nineteenth century and to counteract the effects of its refusal to allow Catholics to participate in the affairs of the Italian state. Modernism's concern was with the relationship of the Church to state and society rather than with theological questions as such, and its main ideological contribution was the theory of "Christian Democracy"—a term which is, for this period, to be understood literally. The Modernist/Christian-Democrat movement was suppressed under the pontificate of Pius X (1903-14) but re-emerged with Sturzo and the Partito Popolare in 1918. The reaction to Modernism connected with Pius X goes under the name of Integralism and was a theological movement aimed at reasserting Church authority against secularisation. Integralism, although ostensibly purely doctrinal, had in practice reactionary social effects, and Christian Democracy was for a long time a progressive trend within the Church. The Partito Popolare adopted an ambiguous attitude to fascism at the outset, but was nevertheless eventually banned, along with the other parties, by the regime; it re-emerged during the resistance, as Christian Democracy. The present-day role of Christian Democracy as a mass political organisation dominated by big capital and the Church hierarchy dates effectively from 1945-47.

* Recall the anecdote, recounted by Steed in his Memoirs,¹⁴ about the Cardinal who explains to the pro-Catholic English Protestant that the miracles of San Gennaro [St. Januarius] are an article of faith for the ordinary people of Naples, but not for the intellectuals, and that even the Gospels contain "exaggerations", and who answers the question "But aren't we Christians?" with the words "We are the 'prelates', that is the 'politicians', of the Church of Rome".

¹⁴ "Steed's memoirs." *Through Thirty Years*, London, 1924, by Henry Wickham Steed, a former editor of *The Times*.

moral bloc which can make politically possible the intellectual progress of the mass and not only of small intellectual groups.

The active man-in-the-mass has a practical activity, but has no clear theoretical consciousness of his practical activity, which nonetheless involves understanding the world in so far as it transforms it.¹⁵ His theoretical consciousness can indeed be historically in opposition to his activity. One might almost say that he has two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousness): one which is implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with all his fellow-workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed. But this verbal conception is not without consequences. It holds together a specific social group, it influences moral conduct and the direction of will, with varying efficacy but often powerfully enough to produce a situation in which the contradictory state of consciousness does not permit of any action, any decision or any choice, and produces a condition of moral and political passivity. Critical understanding of self takes place therefore through a struggle of political "hegemonies" and of opposing directions, first in the ethical field and then in that of politics proper, in order to arrive at the working out at a higher level of one's own conception of reality. Consciousness of being part of a particular hegemonic force (that is to say, political consciousness) is the first stage towards a further progressive self-consciousness in which theory and practice will finally be one. Thus the unity of theory and practice is not just a matter of mechanical fact, but a part of the historical process, whose elementary and primitive phase is to be found in the sense of being "different" and "apart", in an instinctive feeling of independence, and which progresses to the level of real possession of a single and coherent conception of the world. This is why it must be stressed that the political development of the concept of hegemony represents a great philosophical advance as well as a politico-practical one.¹⁶ For it necessarily supposes an intellectual unity and an ethic in conformity with a conception of reality that has gone beyond common

¹⁵ A reference to the 11th of Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*, which Gramsci interprets as meaning that philosophy (and, in particular, the philosophy of praxis) is a socio-practical activity, in which thought and action are reciprocally determined.

¹⁶ The reference here is not only to Marx's argument about "ideas becoming a material force", but also to Lenin and the achievement of proletarian hegemony through the Soviet revolution (see below pp. 381-82).

sense and has become, if only within narrow limits, a critical conception.

However, in the most recent developments of the philosophy of praxis the exploration and refinement of the concept of the unity of theory and practice is still only at an early stage. There still remain residues of mechanicism, since people speak about theory as a "complement" or an "accessory" of practice, or as the handmaid of practice.¹⁷ It would seem right for this question too to be considered historically, as an aspect of the political question of the intellectuals. Critical self-consciousness means, historically and politically, the creation of an *élite*¹⁸ of intellectuals. A human mass does not "distinguish" itself, does not become independent in its own right without, in the widest sense, organising itself; and there is no organisation without intellectuals, that is without organisers and leaders,¹⁹ in other words, without the theoretical aspect of the theory-practice nexus being distinguished concretely by the existence of a group of people "specialised" in conceptual and philosophical elaboration of ideas. But the process of creating intellectuals is long, difficult, full of contradictions, advances and retreats, dispersals and regroupings, in which the loyalty of the masses is often sorely tried. (And one must not forget that at this early stage loyalty and discipline are the ways in which the masses participate and collaborate in the development of the cultural movement as a whole.)

The process of development is tied to a dialectic between the intellectuals and the masses. The intellectual stratum develops both quantitatively and qualitatively, but every leap forward towards a new breadth and complexity of the intellectual stratum is tied to an analogous movement on the part of the mass of the "simple", who raise themselves to higher levels of culture and at the same time extend their circle of influence towards the stratum of specialised intellectuals, producing outstanding individuals and groups of

¹⁷ The notion of the subservience of theory to practice, neatly summed up in this adaptation of the mediaeval adage *philosophia ancilla theologiae* (philosophy the handmaid of theology) has been widespread in the Marxist movement, in forms as diverse as Stalin's formulation "theory must serve practice" (Works, Vol. VI, p. 88) and Rosa Luxemburg's argument (in *Stillstand und Fortschritt im Marxismus*) that theory only develops to the extent that the need for it is created by the practice of the movement.

¹⁸ "*élite*." As is made clear later in the text, Gramsci uses this word (in French in the original) in a sense very different from that of the reactionary post-Pareto theorists of "political *élites*". The *élite* in Gramsci is the revolutionary vanguard of a social class in constant contact with its political and intellectual base. (But see also note 79 on p. 430.)

¹⁹ "*dirigenti*." See notes on Gramsci's terminology, p. xiii.

greater or less importance. In the process, however, there continually recur moments in which a gap develops between the mass and the intellectuals (at any rate between some of them, or a group of them), a loss of contact, and thus the impression that theory is an "accessory", a "complement" and something subordinate. Insistence on the practical element of the theory-practice nexus, after having not only distinguished but separated and split the two elements (an operation which in itself is merely mechanical and conventional), means that one is going through a relatively primitive historical phase, one which is still economic-corporate, in which the general "structural" framework is being quantitatively transformed and the appropriate quality-superstructure is in the process of emerging, but is not yet organically formed. One should stress the importance and significance which, in the modern world, political parties have in the elaboration and diffusion of conceptions of the world, because essentially what they do is to work out the ethics and the politics corresponding to these conceptions and act as it were as their historical "laboratory". The parties recruit individuals out of the working mass, and the selection is made on practical and theoretical criteria at the same time. The relation between theory and practice becomes even closer the more the conception is vitally and radically innovatory and opposed to old ways of thinking. For this reason one can say that the parties are the elaborators of new integral and totalitarian intelligentsias²⁰ and the crucibles where the unification of theory and practice, understood as a real historical process, takes place. It is clear from this that the parties should be formed by individual memberships and not on the pattern of the British Labour Party, because, if it is a question of providing an organic leadership for the entire economically active mass, this leadership should not follow old schemas but should innovate. But innovation cannot come from the mass, at least at the beginning, except through the mediation of an *élite* for whom the conception implicit in human activity has already become to a certain degree a coherent and systematic ever-present awareness and a precise and decisive will.

One of these phases can be studied by looking at the recent discussion in which the latest developments of the philosophy of praxis are brought out, and which has been summarised in an

²⁰ "*intellettuale totalitaria*." It seems certain that *intellettuale* here is a concrete noun meaning "intelligentsia" rather than the abstract "intellectual conception". "Totalitarian" is to be understood not in its modern sense, but as meaning simultaneously "unified" and "all-absorbing".

article by D. S. Mirsky, a collaborator on *La Cultura*.²¹ One can see from this that a change has taken place from a mechanistic and purely external conception to one which is activist and, as has been pointed out, closer to a correct understanding of the unity of theory and practice, although it has not yet attained the full synthetic meaning of the concept. It should be noted how the deterministic, fatalistic and mechanistic element has been a direct ideological "aroma" emanating from the philosophy of praxis, rather like religion or drugs (in their stupefying effect). It has been made necessary and justified historically by the "subaltern"²² character of certain social strata.

When you don't have the initiative in the struggle and the struggle itself comes eventually to be identified with a series of defeats, mechanical determinism becomes a tremendous force of moral resistance, of cohesion and of patient and obstinate perseverance. "I have been defeated for the moment, but the tide of history is working for me in the long term." Real will takes on the garments of an act of faith in a certain rationality of history and in a primitive and empirical form of impassioned finalism²⁴ which appears in the role of a substitute for the Predestination or Providence of confessional religions. It should be emphasised, though, that a strong activity of the will is present even here, directly intervening in the "force of circumstance", but only implicitly, and in a veiled and, as it were, shamefaced manner. Consciousness here, therefore, is contradictory and lacking critical unity, etc. But when the "subaltern" becomes directive and responsible for the economic activity of the masses, mechanism at a certain point becomes an imminent danger and a revision must take place in modes of thinking because a change has taken place in the social mode of existence.²⁵ The boundaries and the dominion of the "force of

²¹ The article referred to is probably D. S. Mirsky, *Demokratie und Partei im Bolschewismus*, in *Demokratie und Partei*, ed. P. R. Rohden, Vienna, 1932. A different article of Mirsky had appeared in *La Cultura* in 1931, and it is possible that Gramsci refers to this magazine in order to quiet the suspicions of the censor, alerted by the Russian name.

²² "subaltern." See note on Gramsci's terminology, p. xiii.

²⁴ "finalism": the notion that history is always working towards a determined end. The idea that Gramsci is attacking is that of historical inevitability, and in particular of the "inevitable" spontaneous collapse of capitalism and its replacement by the socialist order.

²⁵ This is an echo of Marx's statement (Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*) that it is not consciousness which determines being but man's social being which determines his consciousness. This conception is very important to Gramsci and constantly recurs in his prison writings, as do other ideas from the same Preface.

circumstance" become restricted. But why? Because, basically, if yesterday the subaltern element was a thing, today it is no longer a thing but an historical person, a protagonist; if yesterday it was not responsible, because "resisting" a will external to itself, now it feels itself to be responsible because it is no longer resisting but an agent, necessarily active and taking the initiative.

But even yesterday was it ever mere "resistance", a mere "thing", mere "non-responsibility"? Certainly not. Indeed one should emphasise how fatalism is nothing other than the clothing worn by real and active will when in a weak position. This is why it is essential at all times to demonstrate the futility of mechanical determinism: for, although it is explicable as a naïve philosophy of the mass and as such, but only as such, can be an intrinsic element of strength, nevertheless when it is adopted as a thought-out and coherent philosophy on the part of the intellectuals, it becomes a cause of passivity, of idiotic self-sufficiency. This happens when they don't even expect that the subaltern will become directive and responsible. In fact, however, some part of even a subaltern mass is always directive and responsible, and the philosophy of the part always precedes the philosophy of the whole, not only as its theoretical anticipation but as a necessity of real life.

That the mechanistic conception has been a religion of the subaltern is shown by an analysis of the development of the Christian religion. Over a certain period of history in certain specific historical conditions religion has been and continues to be a "necessity", a necessary form taken by the will of the popular masses and a specific way of rationalising the world and real life, which provided the general framework for real practical activity. This quotation from an article in *La Civiltà Cattolica* (*Individualismo pagano e individualismo cristiano*: issue of 5 March 1932) seems to me to express very well this function of Christianity:

"Faith in a secure future, in the immortality of the soul destined to beatitude, in the certainty of arriving at eternal joy, was the force behind the labour for intense interior perfection and spiritual elevation. True Christian individualism found here the impulse that led it to victory. All the strength of the Christian was gathered around this noble end. Free from the flux of speculation which weakens the soul with doubt, and illuminated by immortal principles, man felt his hopes reborn; sure that a superior force was supporting him in the struggle against Evil, he did violence to himself and conquered the world."

But here again it is naïve Christianity that is being referred to: not Jesuitised Christianity, which has become a pure narcotic for the popular masses.

The position of Calvinism, however, with its iron conception of predestination and grace, which produces a vast expansion of the spirit of initiative (or becomes the form of this movement) is even more revealing and significant.*

What are the influential factors in the process of diffusion (which is also one of a substitution of the old conception, and, very often, of combining old and new), how do they act, and to what extent? Is it the rational form in which the new conception is expounded and presented? Or is it the authority (in so far as this is recognised and appreciated, if only generically) of the expositor and the thinkers and experts whom the expositor calls in in his support? Or the fact of belonging to the same organisation as the man who upholds the new conception (assuming, that is, that one has entered the organisation for other reasons than that of already sharing the new conception)?

13 In reality these elements will vary according to social groups and the cultural level of the groups in question. But the enquiry has a particular interest in relation to the popular masses, who are slower to change their conceptions, or who never change them in the sense of accepting them in their "pure" form, but always and only as a more or less heterogeneous and bizarre combination. The rational and logically coherent form, the exhaustive reasoning which neglects no argument, positive or negative, of any significance, has a certain importance, but is far from being decisive. It can be decisive, but in a secondary way, when the person in question is already in a state of intellectual crisis, wavering between the old and the new, when he has lost his faith in the old and has not yet come down in favour of the new, etc.

One could say this about the authority of thinkers and experts: it is very important among the people, but the fact remains that every conception has its thinkers and experts to put forward, and authority does not belong to one side; further, with every thinker

* On this question see: Max Weber, *L'etica protestante e lo spirito del capitalismo*; published in *Nuovi Studi*, volume for 1931 et seq. [*Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*; first published in the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, Vols. XX and XXI, 1904 and 1905. English translation (by Talcott Parsons) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1930.] And see Groethuysen's book on the religious origins of the bourgeoisie in France. [*Origines de l'esprit bourgeois en France*, Vol. I. *L'Eglise et la bourgeoisie*, Paris, 1927.]

it is possible to make distinctions, to cast doubt on whether he really said such and such a thing, etc.

One can conclude that the process of diffusion of new conceptions takes place for political (that is, in the last analysis, social) reasons; but that the formal element, that of logical coherence, the element of authority and the organisational element have a very important function in this process immediately after the general orientation has been reached, whether by single individuals or groups of a certain size. From this we must conclude, however, that in the masses *as such*, philosophy can only be experienced as a faith.

Imagine the intellectual position of the man of the people: he has formed his own opinions, convictions, criteria of discrimination, standards of conduct. Anyone with a superior intellectual formation with a point of view opposed to his can put forward arguments better than he and really tear him to pieces logically and so on. But should the man of the people change his opinions just because of this? Just because he cannot impose himself in a bout of argument? In that case he might find himself having to change every day, or every time he meets an ideological adversary who is his intellectual superior. On what elements, therefore, can his philosophy be founded? and in particular his philosophy in the form which has the greatest importance for his standards of conduct?

The most important element is undoubtedly one whose character is determined not by reason but by faith. But faith in whom, or in what? In particular in the social group to which he belongs, in so far as in a diffuse way it thinks as he does. The man of the people thinks that so many like-thinking people can't be wrong, not so radically, as the man he is arguing against would like him to believe; he thinks that, while he himself, admittedly, is not able to uphold and develop his arguments as well as the opponent, in his group there is someone who could do this and could certainly argue better than the particular man he has against him; and he remembers, indeed, hearing expounded, discursively, coherently, in a way that left him convinced, the reasons behind his faith. He has no concrete memory of the reasons and could not repeat them, but he knows that reasons exist, because he has heard them expounded, and was convinced by them. The fact of having once suddenly seen the light and been convinced is the permanent reason for his reasons persisting, even if the arguments in its favour cannot be readily produced.

These considerations lead, however, to the conclusion that new conceptions have an extremely unstable position among the popular

masses; particularly when they are in contrast with orthodox convictions (which can themselves be new) conforming socially to the general interests of the ruling classes. This can be seen if one considers the fortunes of religions and churches. Religion, or a particular church, maintains its community of faithful (within the limits imposed by the necessities of general historical development) in so far as it nourishes its faith permanently and in an organised fashion, indefatigably repeating its apologetics, struggling at all times and always with the same kind of arguments, and maintaining a hierarchy of intellectuals who give to the faith, in appearance at least, the dignity of thought. Whenever the continuity of relations between the Church and the faithful has been violently interrupted, for political reasons, as happened during the French Revolution, the losses suffered by the Church have been incalculable. If the conditions had persisted for a long time in which it was difficult to carry on practising one's own religion, it is quite possible that these losses would have been definitive, and a new religion would have emerged, as indeed one did emerge in France in combination with the old Catholicism. Specific necessities can be deduced from this for any cultural movement which aimed to replace common sense and old conceptions of the world in general:

1. Never to tire of repeating its own arguments (though offering literary variation of form): repetition is the best didactic means for working on the popular mentality.

2. To work incessantly to raise the intellectual level of ever-growing strata of the populace, in other words, to give a personality to the amorphous mass element. This means working to produce *élites* of intellectuals of a new type which arise directly out of the masses, but remain in contact with them to become, as it were, the whalebone in the corset.²⁸

This second necessity, if satisfied, is what really modifies the "ideological panorama" of the age. But these *élites* cannot be formed or developed without a hierarchy of authority and intellectual competence growing up within them. The culmination of this process can be a great individual philosopher. But he must be capable of re-living concretely the demands of the massive ideological community and of understanding that this cannot have the flexibility of movement proper to an individual brain, and must succeed in giving formal elaboration to the collective doctrine in

²⁸ For Gramsci's theory of the "organic" intellectuals see the essay "The Formation of the Intellectuals", pp. 5-14.

the most relevant fashion, and the one most suited to the modes of thought of a collective thinker.

It is evident that this kind of mass creation cannot just happen "arbitrarily", around any ideology, simply because of the formally constructive will of a personality or a group which puts it forward solely on the basis of its own fanatical philosophical or religious convictions. Mass adhesion or non-adhesion to an ideology is the real critical test of the rationality and historicity of modes of thinking. Any arbitrary constructions are pretty rapidly eliminated by historical competition, even if sometimes, through a combination of immediately favourable circumstances, they manage to enjoy popularity of a kind; whereas constructions which respond to the demands of a complex organic period of history always impose themselves and prevail in the end, even though they may pass through several intermediary phases during which they manage to affirm themselves only in more or less bizarre and heterogeneous combinations.

These developments pose many problems, the most important of which can be subsumed in the form and the quality of the relations between the various intellectually qualified strata; that is, the importance and the function which the creative contribution of superior groups must and can have in connection with the organic capacity of the intellectually subordinate strata to discuss and develop new critical concepts. It is a question, in other words, of fixing the limits of freedom of discussion and propaganda, a freedom which should not be conceived of in the administrative and police sense, but in the sense of a self-limitation which the leaders impose on their own activity, or, more strictly, in the sense of fixing the direction of cultural policy. In other words—who is to fix the "rights of knowledge" and the limits of the pursuit of knowledge? And can these rights and limits indeed be fixed? It seems necessary to leave the task of researching after new truths and better, more coherent, clearer formulations of the truths themselves to the free initiative of individual specialists, even though they may continually question the very principles that seem most essential. And it will in any case not be difficult to expose the fact whenever such proposals for discussion arise because of interested and not scientific motives. Nor is it inconceivable that individual initiatives should be disciplined and subject to an ordered procedure, so that they have to pass through the sieve of academies or cultural institutes of various kinds and only become public after undergoing a process of selection.

It would be interesting to study concretely the forms of cultural

organisation which keep the ideological world in movement within a given country, and to examine how they function in practice. A study of the numerical relationship between the section of the population professionally engaged in active cultural work in the country in question and the population as a whole, would also be useful, together with an approximate calculation of the unattached forces. The school, at all levels, and the Church, are the biggest cultural organisations in every country, in terms of the number of people they employ. Then there are newspapers, magazines and the book trade and private educational institutions, either those which are complementary to the state system, or cultural institutions like the Popular Universities. Other professions include among their specialised activities a fair proportion of cultural activity. For example, doctors, army officers, the legal profession. But it should be noted that in all countries, though in differing degrees, there is a great gap between the popular masses and the intellectual groups, even the largest ones, and those nearest to the peripheries of national life, like priests and school teachers. The reason for this is that, however much the ruling class may affirm to the contrary, the State, as such, does not have a unitary, coherent and homogeneous conception, with the result that intellectual groups are scattered between one stratum and the next, or even within a single stratum. The Universities, except in a few countries, do not exercise any unifying influence: often an independent thinker has more influence than the whole of university institutions, etc.

With regard to the historical role played by the fatalistic conception of the philosophy of praxis one might perhaps prepare its funeral oration, emphasising its usefulness for a certain period of history, but precisely for this reason underlining the need to bury it with all due honours. Its role could really be compared with that of the theory of predestination and grace for the beginnings of the modern world, a theory which found its culmination in classical German philosophy and in its conception of freedom as the consciousness of necessity.²⁷ It has been a replacement in the popular consciousness for the cry of "'tis God's will", although even on this primitive, elementary plane it was the beginnings of a more modern and fertile conception than that contained in the expression "'tis God's will" or in the theory of grace. Is it possible that a "formally" new conception can present itself in a guise other than the crude, unsophisticated version of the populace? And yet the

²⁷ "the consciousness of necessity." This notion, which originated with Spinoza, plays a particularly important role in Hegelian philosophy.

historian, with the benefit of all necessary perspective, manages to establish and to understand the fact that the beginnings of a new world, rough and jagged though they always are, are better than the passing away of the world in its death-throes and the swan-song that it produces.*

PROBLEMS OF PHILOSOPHY AND HISTORY

Scientific discussion

In the formulation of historico-critical problems it is wrong to conceive of scientific discussion as a process at law in which there is an accused and a public prosecutor whose professional duty it is to demonstrate that the accused is guilty and has to be put out of

* The fading away of "fatalism" and "mechanicism" marks a great historical turning-point: hence the great impression of Mirsky's résumé. Memories that it has raised: I remember in Florence in November 1917, a discussion with Mario Trozzi, and the first mention of Bergsonism, voluntarism, etc.²⁸ One could make a semi-serious sketch of how this conception presented itself in reality. I also remember a discussion with Professor Presutti in Rome in June 1924. Comparison with Capt. Giulietti made by G. M. Serrati, which was for him decisive and conferred a death sentence. For Serrati, Giulietti was like the Confucian to the Taoist, like the southern Chinese, the busy and active merchant, in the eyes of the mandarin scholar from the North, who looks down with the supreme contempt of the enlightened sage for whom life holds no more mysteries, on the southern mannikins who hope, with their busy, ant-like movements to capture "the way". Speech by Claudio Treves on expiation. This speech had something of the spirit of an Old Testament prophet. Those who had wanted and had made the war, who had torn the world from its hinges and were therefore responsible for post-war disorder, had to expiate their sins and bear the responsibility for the disorder; they were guilty of "voluntarism" and had to be punished for their sin, etc. There was a certain priestly grandeur about this speech, a crescendo of maledictions which should have petrified us with terror but were instead a great consolation, because they showed that the undertaker was not yet ready and that Lazarus could still rise again.

²⁸ The meeting in question took place between various leaders and adherents of the "intransigent" current of the Socialist Party on the night of 18 November 1917. It was mainly concerned with preparing a document criticising the reformist wing of the Party for its attitude to the war. In the course of the discussion Trozzi appears to have taken Gramsci to task for Bergsonian voluntarism. That Gramsci's views at the time were decidedly unorthodox by the standards of the Second International, is shown by his famous article saluting the Soviet revolution, *La Rivoluzione contro il 'Capitale'*, published in *Avanti!* a week after the meeting with Trozzi and others, which was subsequently widely criticised for apparently counterposing "Leninist" revolutionism to "Marxist" passivity and determinism. Gramsci, in fact, as he makes clear here in the *Quaderni*, did not know Bergson's writing at the time. Bergson had, however, influenced Sorel, who in turn had influenced Gramsci in an early period. The result of Trozzi's charge was to lead Gramsci to a re-examination and criticism of idealistic and Bergsonian influences in Sorel's work.